GOLD COAST CUSTOMS

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

EDITH SITWELL

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GOLD COAST CUSTOMS

By EDITH SITWELL

RUSTIC ELEGIES
BUCOLIC COMEDIES
THE SLEEPING BEAUTY
TROY PARK

EDITH SITWELL BY PAVEL TCHELITCHEW

GOLD COAST CUSTOMS

BY

EDITH SITWELL

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TO
HELEN ROOTHAM

GOLD COAST CUSTOMS*

In Ashantee, a hundred years ago, the death of any rich or important person was followed by several days of national ceremonies, during which the utmost licence prevailed, and slaves and poor persons were killed that the bones of the deceased might be laved with human blood. These ceremonies were called Customs.

One fantee wave
Is grave and tall
As brave Ashantee's
Thick mud wall.
Munza* rattles his bones in the dust,
Lurking in murk because he must.

Striped black and white
Is the squealing light.
The dust brays white in the market place,
Dead powder spread on a black skull's face.

Like monkey skin
Is the sea—one sin
Like a weasel is nailed to bleach on the rocks
Where the eyeless mud screeched fawning, mocks

* See notes at end of book.

At a negro that wipes
His knife . . . dug there
A bugbear bellowing
Bone dared rear—
A bugbear bone that bellows white
As the ventriloquist sound of light,

It rears at his head-dress of felted black hair
The one humanity clinging there—
His eyeless face whitened like black and white bones
And his beard of rusty
Brown grass cones.

Hard blue and white
Courie shells (the light
Grown hard) outline
The leopardskin musty
Leaves that shine
With an animal smell both thick and fusty.

One house like a ratskin
Mask flaps fleet
In the sailor's tall
Ventriloquist street
Where the rag houses flap—
Hiding a gap.

Here tier on tier
Like a black box rear
In the flapping slum
Beside Death's docks.
I did not know this meaner Death
Meant this : that the bunches of nerves still dance
And caper among these slums and prance.

" Mariners, put your bones to bed ! "
But at Lady Bamburgher's parties each head
Grinning knew it had left its bones
In the mud with the white skulls . . . only the grin
Is left, strings of nerves, and the drum-taut skin.

When the sun in the empty
Sky is high
In his dirty brown and white
Birdskin dress—
He hangs like a skull
With a yellow dull
Face made of clay
(Where tainted, painted, the plague-spots bray)
To hide where the real face rotted away.

So our wormskin and paper masks still keep,
Above the rotting bones they hide,
The marks of the Plague whereof we died :

The belief,
The grief,
The love,
Or the grin
Of the shapeless worm-soft unshaping Sin—
Unshaping till no more the beat of the blood
Can raise up the body from endless mud
Though the hell-fires cold
As the worm, and old,
Are painted upon each unshaped form—
No more man, woman, or beast to see—
But the universal, devouring Worm.

When the sun of dawn looks down on the shrunken
Heads, drums of skin, and the dead men drunken,
I only know one half of my heart
Lies in that terrible coffin of stone
My body that stalks through the slum alone.
But that half of my heart
That is in your breast
You gave for meat
In the sailor's street
To the rat that had only my bones to eat.

But those hardened hearts
That roll and sprawl
In a cowl of foul blind monkey-skin

Lest the whips of the light crash roaring in—
Those hearts that roll
Down the phantom street
They have for their beat
The cannibal drums
And the cries of the slums
And the Bamburgher parties—they have them all!

One high house flaps . . . taps.
Light's skin drum—
Monkey-like shrunk
On all fours now come
The parties' sick ghosts, each hunting himself—
Black gaps beneath an ape's thick pelf,

Chasing a rat,
Their soul's ghost fat
Through the negro swamp
Slum hovel's cramp
Of Lady Bamburgher's parties above
With the latest grin, and the latest love,

And the latest game:
To show the shame
Of the rat-fat soul to the grinning day
With even the ratskin flayed away.

Now, a thick cloud floating
Low o'er the lake,
Millions of flies
Begin to awake,
With the animation
Of smart conversation :
From Bedlam's madness the thick gadflies
Seek for the broken statue's eyes.

Where the mud and the murk
Whispering lurk :
" From me arises everything,
The negro's louse
The armadillo,
Munza's bone and his peccadillo,"

Where flaps degraded
The black and sated
Slack macerated
And antiquated
Beckoning negress
Nun of the shade,

And the rickety houses
Rock and rot,
Lady Bamburgher airs
That foul plague-spot

Her romantic heart.
From the cannibal mart
That smart Plague-cart
Lady Bamburgher rolls where the foul news-sheet
And the shambles for souls are set in the street.

And stuck in front
Of this world-tall Worm,
Stuck in front
Of this world's confession—
Like something rolled
Before a procession
Is the face, a flimsy wormskin thing
That someone has raked
From the low plague-pit
As a figure-head
For Corruption dead,
And a mask for the universal Worm.

Her apeskin yellow
Tails of hair
Clung about her bone-white bare
Eyeless mask that cackled there :

The Worm's mask hid
Her eyeless mud
Her shapeless love,

The plot to escape
From the God-ordained shape,

And her soul, the cannibal
Amazon's mart,
Where in squealing light
And clotted black night
On the monkey-skin black and white striped dust they
Cackle and bray
To the murdered day,

And the Amazon queen
With a bone-black face
Wears a mask with an apeskin beard ; she grinds
Her male child's bones in a mortar, binds
Him for food, and the people buy. For this

Hidden behind
The Worm's mask grown
White as a bone
Where eyeholes rot wide
And are painted for sight,
And the little mouth red as a dead Plague-spot
On that white mask painted to hide Death's rot,

For this painted Plague-cart's
Heart, for this

Slime of the Worm that paints her kiss
And the dead men's bones round her throat and wrist,
The half of my heart that lay in your breast
Has fallen away
To rot and bray
With the painted mud through the eyeless day.

The dust of all the dead can blow
Backwards and forwards, to and fro
To cover the half of my heart with death's rot,
Yet the dust of that other half comes not
To this coffin of stone that stalks through the slum
Though love to you now is the deaf Worm's lust
That, cloven in halves, will reunite
Foulness to deadness in the dust
And chaos of the enormous night.

How far is our innocent paradise,
The blue-striped sand,
Bull-bellowing band
Of waves, and the great gold suns made wise
By the dead days and the horizons grand.

Can a planet tease
With its great gold train
Walking beside the pompous main—
That great gold planet the heat of the Sun

Where we saw black Shadow, a black man, run,
So a negress dare
Wear long gold hair?
The negress Dorothy one sees
Beside the caverns and the trees
Where her parasol
Throws a shadow tall
As a waterfall—
The negress Dorothy still feels
The great gold planet tease her brain.

And dreaming deep within her blood
Lay Africa like the dark in the wood.
For Africa is the unhistoric
Unremembering, unrhetorical
Undeveloped spirit involved
In the conditions of nature—Man
That black image of stone hath delved
On the threshold where history began.

Now under the cannibal
Sun is spread
The black rhinoceros-hide of the mud
For endlessness and timelessness . . . dead
Grass creaks like a carrion-bird's voice, rattles,
Squeaks like a wooden shuttle. Battles
Have worn this deserted skeleton black

As empty chain armour . . . lazily back
With only the half of its heart it lies
With the giggling mud devouring its eyes,
Naught left to fight
But the black clotted night
In its heart, and ventriloquist squealing light.

But lying beneath the giggling mud
I thought there was something living the bray
Of the eyeless mud can not betray—
Though it is buried beneath black bones
Of the fetiches screeching like overtones
Of the light, as they feel the slaves' spilt blood.

In tiers like a box
Beside the docks
The negro prays
The negro knocks.
" Is anyone there ? "
His mumblings tear
Nothing but paper walls, and the blare
Of the gaping capering empty air.
The cannibal drums still roll in the mud
To the bones of the king's mother laved in blood
And the trophies with long black hair, shrunken heads
That drunken shrunk upon tumbled beds.

The negro rolls
His red eyeballs,
Prostrates himself.
The negro sprawls.
His God is but a flat black stone
Upright upon a squeaking bone.

The negro's dull
Red eyeballs roll. . . .
The immortality of the soul
Is but black ghosts that squeak through the hole
That once seemed eyes in Munza's skull.

This is his god:
The cannibal sun
On bones that played
For evermore
And the rusty roar
Of the ancient Dead
And the squealing rat
The soul's ghost fat.

So Lady Bamburgher's Shrunken Head,
Slum hovel, is full of the rat-eaten bones
Of a fashionable god that lived not
Ever, but still has bones to rot:
A bloodless and an unborn thing

That cannot wake, yet cannot sleep,
That makes no sound, that cannot weep,
That hears all, bears all, cannot move—
It is buried so deep
Like a shameful thing
In that plague-spot heart, Death's last dust-heap.

. . . . .

A tall house flaps
In the canvas street,
Down in the wineshop
The Amazons meet

With the tall abbess
Of the shade . . .
A ghost in a gown
Like a stiff brigade

Watches the sailor
With a guitar
Lure the wind
From the islands far.

Oh far horizons and bright blue wine
And majesty of the seas that shine,
Bull-bellowing waves that ever fall
Round the god-like feet and the goddess tall!

A great yellow flower
With the silence shy
To the wind from the islands
Sighs ' I die.'

At the foot of the steps
Like the navy-blue ghost
Of a coiling negro
In dock slums lost

(The ghost haunting steamers
And cocktail bars,
Card-sharpers, schemers
And Pullman cars)

A ripple rose
With mud at its root
And weeping kissed
A statue's foot.

In the sailor's tall
Ventriloquist street
The calico dummies
Flap and meet :
Calculate : " Sally go
Pick up a sailor."
Behind that façade
The worm is a jailor.

" I cannot stiffen . . . I left my bones
Down in the street : no overtones
Of the murdered light can join my dust
To my black bones pressed in the House of Lust.
Only my feet still walk in the street.
But where is my heart and its empty beat ?

Starved silly Sally, you dilly and dally,
The dummies said when I was a girl.
The rat deserts a room that is bare,
But Want, a cruel rat gnawing there
Ate to the heart, all else was gone,
Nothing remained but Want alone.
So now I'm a gay girl, a calico dummy
With nothing left alive but my feet
That walk up and down in the Sailor's Street.

Behind the bawdy hovels like hoardings
Where harridans peer from a grovelling boarding
House, the lunatic
Wind still shakes
My empty rag-body, nothing wakes.
The wind like a lunatic in a fouled
Nightgown, whipped those rags and howled.

Once I saw it come
Through the canvas slum,
Rattle and beat what seemed a drum,
Rattle and beat it with a bone.

O Christ, that bone was dead, alone.
Christ, Who will speak to such ragged Dead
As me, I am dead, alone and bare,
They expose me still to the grinning air,
I shall never gather my bones and my dust
Together (so changed and scattered, lost . . .)
So I can be decently burièd.
What is that whimpering like a child
That this mad ghost beats like a drum in the air?
The heart of Sal
That once was a girl
And now is a calico thing to loll
Over the easy steps of the slum
Waiting for something dead to come."

From Rotten Alley and Booble Street
The beggars crawl to starve near the meat
Of the reeling appalling cannibal mart
And Lady Bamburgher, smart Plague-cart.
Red rag face and a cough that tears
They creep through the mud of the docks from their lairs;
And when the dog-whining dawn light
Nosed for their hearts, whined in fright
With a sly high animal
Whimpering, half-frightened call
To worlds outside our consciousness
It finds no heart within their dress.

The Rat has eaten
That and beaten
Hope and love and memory
At last, and even the will to die.
But what is the loss ? For you cannot sell
The heart to those that have none for Hell
To fatten on . . . or that cheap machine
And its beat would make springs for the dancing feet
Of Lady Bamburgher down in the street
Of her dogs that nose out each other's sin,
And grin, and whine, and roll therein.

Against the Sea-wall are painted signs
" Here for a penny a sailor dines."
Each Rag-and-Bone
Is propped up tall
(Lest in death it fall)
Against the Sea-wall.
Their empty mouths are sewed up whole
Lest from hunger they gape and cough up their soul.
The arms of one are stretched out wide . . .
How long, since our Christ was crucified ?

Rich man Judas,
Brother Cain,
The rich men are your worms that gain
The air through seething from your brain.

Judas, mouldering in your old
Coffin body, still undying
As the Worm, where you are lying
With no flesh for warmth, but gold
For flesh, for warmth, for sheet,
Is your gold hard as Hell's huge polar street,
Is the universal blackness of Hell's day so cold?

. . . . .

When, creeping over
The Sailor's street
Where the houses like ratskin
Masks flap, meet
Never across the murdered bone
Of the sailor, the whining overtone

Of dawn sounds, slaves
Rise from their graves
Where in the corpse-sheet night they lay
Forgetting the mutilating day,
Like the unborn child in its innocent sleep.
Ah Christ, the murdered light must weep—
(Christ that takest away the sin
Of the world, and the rich man's bone-dead grin)
The light must weep
Seeing that sleep
And those slaves rise up in their death-chains, part
The light from the eyes

The hands from the heart,
Since their hearts are flesh for the tall
And sprawling
Reeling appalling
Cannibal mart,
But their hands and head
Are machines to breed
Gold for the old and the greedy Dead.

I have seen the murdered God look through the eyes
Of the drunkard's smirched
Mask as he lurched
O'er the half of my heart that lies in the street
Neath the dancing fleas and the foul news-sheet.

Where, a black gap flapping,
A white skin drum
The cannibal houses
Watch this come—
Lady Bamburgher's party; for the plan
Is a prize for those that on all fours ran
Through the rotting slum
Till those who come
Could never guess from the mudcovered shapes
Which are the rich or the mired dire apes
As they run where the souls, dirty paper, are blown
In the hour before dawn, through this long hell of stone.

Perhaps if I too lie down in the mud
Beneath tumbrils rolling
And mad skulls galloping
Far from their bunches of nerves that dance
And caper among these slums and prance—
Beneath the noise of that hell that rolls
I shall forget the shrunken souls
The eyeless mud squealing ' God is dead,'
Starved men (bags of wind), and the harlot's tread,
The heaven turned into monkey-hide
By Lady Bamburgher's dancing fleas
Her rotting parties and death-slack ease,
And the dead men drunken
(The only tide)
Blown up and down
And tossed through the town
Over the half of my heart that lies
Deep down in this meaner Death with cries.

The leaves of black hippopotamus-hide
Black as the mud
Cover the blood
And the rotting world. Do we smell and see

That sick thick smoke from London burning,
Gomorrah turning
Like worms in the grave,

The Bedlam daylights murderous roar,
Those pillars of fire the drunkard and whore,
Dirty souls boiled in cannibal cookshops to paper
To make into newspapers, flags ? . . . They caper
Like gaping apes. Foul fires we see,
For Bedlam awakes to reality.

The drunkard burning
The skin drums galloping
In their long march still parched for the sky,
The Rotten Alleys where beggars groan
And the beggar and his dog share a bone.
The rich man Cain that hides within
His lumbering palaces where Sin
Through the eyeless holes of Day peers in,
The murdered heart that all night turns
From small machine to shapeless Worm
With hate, and like Gomorrah burns—
These put the eyes of Heaven out,
These raise all Hell's throats to a shout,
These break my heart's walls toppling in
And like a universal sea
The nations of the Dead crowd in.

Bahunda, Banbangala, Barumbe, Bonge,
And London fall . . . rolling human skin drums
Surrounded by long black hair, I hear

Their stones that fall
Their voices that call
Among the black and the bellowing bones.

But yet when the cannibal
Sun is high
The sightless mud
Weeps tears, a sigh,
To rhinoceros-hided leaves: "Ah why
So sightless, earless, voiceless, I?"

The mud has at least its skulls to roll.
But here as I walk, no voices call.
Only the stones and the bones that fall.
But yet if only one soul would whine
Rat-like from the lowest mud I should know
That somewhere in God's vast love it would shine.
But even the rat-whine has guttered low.

SIX SONGS*

I

Between the amber portals of the sea
The gilded fleece of heat hangs on my tree.
My skin is bright as this . . .
Come, wind, and smooth my skin, bright as your kiss.

Less bright, less bright than Fatima's gold skin
My gilded fleece that sighs
'She is the glittering dew born of the heat,
She is that young gazelle, the leaping Sun of Paradise.'

Come, Nubian shade, smooth the gilt fleece's curl
Until your long dark fluid hands unfold
My peach, that cloud of gold,
Its kernel, crackling amber water-cold.

Shine, Fatima, my Sun, show your gold face
Through panached ostrich plumes of leaves, then from above
My ripening fruits will feel the bright dew fall apace
Till at your feet I pour my golden love.

* See note.

II

THE STRAWBERRY

Beneath my dog-furred leaves you see
The creeping strawberry
In a gold net
The footprints of the dew have made more wet.

Mahomet resting on a cloud of gold
Dreamed of the strawberry
Made of the purpling gauzy heat
And jasper dust trod by his golden feet,—

The jasper dust beside
The fountain tide,
The water jacynth-cold
The water-ripples like mosaics gold
Have made my green leaves wide and water-cold.

From palaces among the widest leaves
My Sun, my Fatima
Shows her gold face and sighs
And darkness dies.

At noon my Fatima, my bright gazelle
Walks by each gauzy bell
Of strawberries made of such purpling air
As the heat knows, and there

When Fatima, my dew with golden foot
Comes like all the music of the air
Then shine my berries till those golden footsteps die—
Like all the glittering desert of the air when the hot sun
goes by.

III

THE GREENGAGE TREE

From gold-mosaic'd wave
And from the fountain cave
Grew my dark-plumaged leaves all green and fountain-
cold,
My minarets of gold.

Mosaic'd like the tomb
Far in the forest gloom,
Of water-lovely Fatima in forests far away.
The gardener doth sway

The branches and doth find
(As wrinkled dark and kind
As satyrs) these with satyrs' straw beards twined
By that gold-fingered arborist the wind.

Among thick leaves the shade
Seems like a cavalcade
Or Artemis plume-helmeted from sylvan serenade,
Or Amazons' ambassade.

A Caliph plays a lute,
A gardener plays a flute,

Then from my feathered stem a most delightful gust, a
glittering sea
Grow in my rich fruit.

And each bird-angel comes
To sip dark honey from my plums,
My rich green amber gums
That make puffed feather sleeves, long feathered skirts
all gold
And sticky from the dew my golden net doth hold.

IV

THE NECTARINE TREE

This rich and swanskin tree has grown
From the nymphs' amber blood and bone.

What laughter falls like rain or tears
Among my boughs, what golden shears?

Come gardener, and tie
With your long beard of bass
So like the winds' fair hair
The pillars of my tree, and win
The wind to me.

Smooth as the amber skin
Of fair Parthenope
And that smooth nymph that changed into a tree
Each swan-soft silver skin,
Or like Parthenope's smooth voice that falls like amber
Or moonlight falling in her deep sea-tinselled chamber.

V

THE CHERRY TREE

Why has the Shepherdess black with the Sun
Locks fair as a sheepskin waterfall? . . . Run,
Glittering wind from my cherry tree
And call her, call her, to me.

Wind, pull at her sheepskin waterfall locks . . .
These coral tears
So rich and bright
Will change her whom the Sun made black
To the Ethiopian splendour night.

VI

DAPHNE

Heat of the sun that maketh all men black,—
They are but Ethiopian shades of thee—
Pour down upon this wild and glittering fleece
That is more rich than feathers of bright birds
The ripening gems, the drops of the still night.
I parch for that still shade, my heat of love
That parched those ripening gems hath withered me.

Come with the African pomp and train of waves,
Give me your darkness, my immortal shade,
Beside the waterwells my heart hath known.
The shepherds hairy-rough as satyrs come,
Bring up their fleeces that are waterfull
With freshness clear as precious gums of trees
Where weep the incense trees from some deep smart,
So the fresh water from your fleece flows in
To fill with richness all my desert heart.

THE SERENADE AT MORNING

FOR MY SISTER GEORGIA

A Page sings :

" Bird-breasted flutes by the green waterfalls,
The green bird-bosomed waterfalls
Sound where the roses, flaxen fruits, sing madrigals.

Now in this smoother greener shade
Listen to my serenade.

Where still the squirrel shadows brush the leaves
My carriage-wheels are like the gilt wheat-sheaves.

The smiles like water flash . . .
And, cataracts that dash,
My horses' hoofs
Seem, and the carriage seems the sun's gold phaeton,
sheaves
Of corn enwreathe it, trails of buds and leaves.

But in your gold-touched house you still do keep,
Like the bright Sun, a leaf-pavilioned sleep.

The Sun that blackamoor, dark page,
Plays on his flute till through the golden cage
Of the bright wind beneath your window tall
The gilded spangles fall.

The gardener waters your bright orange-tree
And each gold water-drop seems a dark drowsy bee.

The Sun, that blackamoor,
Comes in a bird-mask
With a bird-flute, and asks
Which is the gilded Fleece and which the long and
legendary Sea,
The Sleeper's tangled hair or water-cold gold orange tree.

Then from the perfumed stem and wind-smooth fruits
do pour
Such amber tears as the rich Sun doth weep
Among his thick pavilion of leaves
In his deep noonday sleep.

I sang of country pleasures where great Pan
With Faunus tumbled and like rough bears ran.

Gilt tents of hay bear butter-yellow dew
And leaves bear green bird-breasted dew that flew

To whisper at a maiden's leafy sill
Of country love among the leaves, the chill

Of eve; the squirrel-shadows brush the leaves
And the bees' nests are rustling like gilt sheaves;
On squirrel-ruddy grass the satyrs roam,
Wag beards of straw, suck honey from the comb,

In Pan's huge forest . . . country temples green
The huge leaves seem, their gold-mosaic'd sheen
Is dark as honeycombs . . . the bees write ' Corydon '
And ' Amaryllis ' with gold honeycombs upon

The tents of country hay and roses' leaves.
And there the butter seems like gilded sheaves,

The winds, those honeyed thieves, from each rose-bell
Steal honey that is dark as Philomel.

But in your golden house
Not even the Sun doth rouse
You, though among the corn
Rustling like the morn
The reapers with the green bird-blood within their veins
And shadows green as leaves that stain
Their apple-bright and ruddy flesh, again

Wake, the bird-breasted greenest dew
Lay like a bird and flew
Dying upon the leaves and sighing
Of country love that in the earth is lying.

' Green dew, bird-breasted dew,
Fly, fly into her breast,
Sing to her through the leaves
And window eaves

Until she too shall turn into a bird,
Fly like a bird to me,
And seek her rest
Among my greenest leaves '.
I heard
That golden-fingered arborist the Shade
Among those green leaves sigh this serenade."

His kind velvet bonnet
Warmly lies upon
My weary lap, and on it
My tears run.

The black and furry fire
Sinks low, and like the dire
Sound of charring coal, the black
Cat's whirring back.

On the bare bough
A few blue threadbare leaves,
A few blue plaided leaves grow
Like mornings and like eves.

Scotch bonnet, bonny,
Lying on my gown,
The fire was once, hey nonny,
A battlemented town.

And every morn I build
Those steep castles there
And every night they're ruined
Like the boughs bare.

And nothing doth remain,
Kind bonny, but my pain,
And night and morn, like boughs they're bare,
With nobody to care.

THE BAT

Castellated, tall
From battlements fall
Shades on heroic
Lonely grass
Where the moonlight's echoes die and pass.
Near the rustic boorish
Fustian Moorish
Castle wall of the ultimate Shade
With his cloak castellated as that wall, afraid,
The mountebank doctor,
The old stage quack
Where decoy duck dust
Began to clack
Watched Heliogabalusene the Bat
In his furred cloak hang head down from the flat
Wall, cling to what is convenient,
Lenient.
"If you hang upside down with squeaking shrill,
You will see dust, lust, and the will to kill,
And life is a matter of which way falls
Your tufted turreted Shade near these walls.
For muttering guttering shadow will plan
If you're ruined wall, or pygmy man"
Said Heliogabalusene, "or a pig,
Or the empty Cæsar in tall periwig."

And the mountebank doctor
The old stage quack
Spread out a black membraned wing of his cloak
And his shuffling footsteps seem to choke
Near the Castle wall of the ultimate Shade
Where decoy duck dust
Quacks, clacks, afraid.

METAMORPHOSIS

The coral-cold snow seemed the Parthenon,
Huge peristyle of temples that are gone
And dark as Asia now is Beauty's daughter
The rose, once clear as music o'er deep water.

Now the full moon her fire and light doth spill
On turkey-plumaged leaves and window-sill,

On leaves that seem the necks and plumes of urban
Turkeys, each a Sultan in a turban,

And strawberries among the beavers' wool
(So grass seemed where that ruined temple's cool

Shade fell). When first the dew with golden foot
Makes tremble every leaf and strawberry root

The rainbow gives those berries light above,
The dark rose gives them all her secret love,

Until those coral tears of the rich light
Hold roses rubies rainbows for the sight.

My ancient shadow nods a turbaned head;
One candle through thick leaves throws a gold thread;

The dark green country temple of the snows
Hides porphyry bones of nymphs whence grew the rose,

And dark green dog-haired leaves of strawberries
All marked with maps of unknown lands and seas,

And that small negro page, the cross dark quail,
Chasing the ghosts of dairymaids that fail

In butter-yellow dew by Georgian stables
(The snow, dark green as strawberry leaves, has gables).

But Time, a heavy ghost, groans through thick leaves,
Time is a weary bell which ever grieves,

It is not Death which is the skeleton—
But Time; Death merely strikes the hour of one,

Night's creeping end ere light begins again.
O Death has never worm for heart and brain

Like that which Time conceives to fill his grave,
Devouring the last faith, the word love gave,

Changing the light in eyes to heavy tears,
Changing the beat in heart to empty years

Wherein we listen for that little sound
Of footsteps that come never to our ground.

How terrible these winter nights must be
To the deserted Dead . . . if we could see

The eternal anguish of the skeleton,
So fleshless even the dog leaves it alone,

Atridæ-like devouring its own blood
With hopeless love beneath the earth's blind hood :
For warmth, the rags of flesh about the bone
Devoured by black disastrous dreams, alone

The worm is their companion, vast years
Pile mountain-high above, and the last tears

Freeze to gigantic polar nights of ice
Around the heart through crumbling centuries.

O Dead, your heart is gone, it cannot weep !
From decency the skeleton must sleep.

O heart, shrink out of sight, you have no flesh
For love or dog or worm to court afresh,

Only your youthful smile is mirrored lone
In that eternity the skeleton.

For never come they now, nor comes the hour
When your lips spoke, and winter broke in flower,

The Parthenon was built by your dead kiss.
What should they seek, now you are changed to this

Vast craggy bulk, strong as the prophet's rock?
No grief tears waters from that stone to mock
Death's immobility, and changed to stone
Those eyelids see one sight and one alone.

What do they see? Some lost and childish kiss
In summers ere they knew that love was this,

The terrible Gehenna of the bone
Deserted by the flesh, tears changed to stone?

Or do they blame us that we walk this earth,
Who are more dead than they, nor seek rebirth

Nor change? The snowflake's six-rayed star can see
Rock-crystal's cold six-rayed eternity,—

Thus light grief melts in craggy waterfalls;
But mine melts never, though the last spring calls:

The polar night's huge boulder hath rolled this
My heart, my Sisyphus, in the abyss.

Do the Dead know the nights wherein we grope
From our more terrible abyss of hope
To soft despair? The nights when creeping Fear
Crumples our hearts, knowing when age appear

Our sun, our love, will leave us more alone
Than the black mouldering rags about the bone?

Age shrinks our hearts to ape-like dust . . . that ape
Looks through the eyes where all death's chasms gape

Between ourself and what we used to be.
My soul, my Lazarus, know you not me?

Am I so changed by Time's appalling night?
'Tis but my bone that cannot stand upright,

That leans as if it thirsted . . . for what spring?
The ape's bent skeleton foreshadowing,

With head bent from the light, its only kiss.
Do the Dead know that metamorphosis

When the appalling lion-claws of age
With talons tear the cheek and heart, yet rage

For life devours the bone, a tigerish fire?
But quenched in the vast empire of the mire

These craters cry not to the eternal bone:
The Dead may hide the changing skeleton.

So quench the light, my Lazarus, nor see
The thing we are, the thing that we might be:

In mouldering cerements of that thick grave
Our flesh, we lose the one light that could save.

But yet it shall avail that grass shall sing
From loveless bones in some foreshadowed spring,

And summer break from a long-shadowed kiss
Though our dry bones are sunless grown as this,

And eyeless statues, broken and alone
In shadeless avenues, the music gone,
We stand . . . the leaves we knew are black as jet
Though the light scatters feathers on them yet,

Remembering sylvan nymphs . . . Death is our clime,
And, among heavy leaves, our bell to chime—

Death is our sun, illumining our old
Dim-jewelled bones—Death is our winter cold;

Yet sighs of voyages and landing stages
From unknown seas, and sylvan equipages

And of a clime where Death's light on the eyes
Could make each shapeless lump of clay grow wise,

The topaz, sapphires, diamonds of the bone,
That mineral in our earth's dark mine, alone
Leap to the eastern light . . . Death-blinded eyes
See beyond wild bird-winged discoveries.

Death is the Sun's heat making all men black.
O Death, the splendours die in the leaves' track :

All men are Ethiopian shades of thee.
The wild and glittering fleece Parthenope

Loosened, more rich than feathers of bright birds,
Though rich and thick as Ethiopian herds

Died like the wave, or early light that grew
In eastern quarries ripening precious dew.*

Though lovely are the tombs of the dead nymphs
On the heroic shore, the glittering plinths
Of jacynth, hyacinthine waves profound
Sigh of the beauty out of sight and sound

And many a golden foot that pressed the sand,
The panoply of suns on distant strand.

* Dryden's Annus Mirabilis.

Panōpe walking like the pomp of waves
With plumaged helmet near the fountain caves

Is only now an arena for the worm;
Her golden flesh lies in the dust's frail storm

And beauty water-bright for long is laid
Deep in the empire of eternal shade;

Only the sighing waves know now the plinth
Of those deep tombs that were of hyacinth.

Still echoes of that helmeted bright hair
Are like the pomp of tropic suns, the blare

That from the inaccessible horizon runs,
The eternal music of heroic suns
When their strong youth comes freshened from deep seas,
And the first music heard among the trees.

By elephant trunks of the water, showers
Now change to cornucopias of flowers;

Panōpe with her dark majestic train
Of nymphs walked like the pomp of waves; the main

Sees Asia, Parthenope, Eunomia,
Euphrosyne, Urania, Ausonia,

In feathered head-dresses as bright as sleep,
As onward with the pomp of waves they sweep

In pelongs, chelloes, and great palampores,
Gaze d'Ispahan and bulchauls, salampores,

In plumaged turbans, sweeping gros des Indes
That the long golden fingers of the winds

Pull by the waters paler than a pearl.
The airs like rain-wet shrinking petals curl

And waves are freckled with gold ripples, these
Seem golden spangles on the strawberries ;
And black Bacchantes with their panached feathers
Wear mittens with gold fringe bright as the weathers

Where elephant trunks of the water rear
As the great pomp and train of nymphs draws near,

An ambassade of Amazons ; rich trees
And Abyssinian glooms have fostered these.

But now Melpomene, Zenobia,
The Amazons black as Ethiopia

In Pan's huge forests seem like statues tall
Where the thick jewels from the rich figs fall

In this vast empire of eternal shade
Where leaves seem Memphis, Thebes, from music made.

In wooded gardens by each gardener's frame
Dark wrinkled satyrs with long straw beards came

Dark honey from rough cups of straw to sip,
And every straw cup has an amber lip.

The gardener wrinkled dark beside a cave
Sways branches gold-mosaic'd as the wave

And finds these are with satyrs' straw beards twined
By that gold-fingered arborist, the wind.

And there beside the greenest shaggiest caves
As green as melons hiding honey waves

The rose that shone like the first light of tears
Was once a buskined bright nymph in lost years

And from the amber dust that was a rose
In the green heat Parthenope still grows.

In this green world the melons' dogskin flowers,
Leaves green as country temples, snare the hours

And dew seems butter-yellow, the bright mesh
Of dear and dead Panōpe's golden flesh

Where grapes and apples boom like emerald rain
In green baize forests, and the sylvan train

Of country nymphs wear yellow petticoats
Looped over leathern gaiters ; long hair floats,
Cream-coloured and as thick as ponies' manes
Through swan-soft great mauve leaves where Jove's
gold rains

Still fly ; rich strawberries are honeyed cold
By all Pan's honey and Palmyra's gold

And in the laughing green the rich fruits ran
With gilded honeyed blood of Phœbus, Pan.

But now the branches droop their melancholy
And owl-soft dusk upon this summer folly.

And under trees that were as fresh and green
As laughing nymphs' guitar and mandoline

(When country nymphs wear yellow petticoats
Looped over leathern gaiters, long hair floats

From straw hats trimmed with pheasants' feathers
twined
By the long golden fingers of the wind)

The broken country statue Corydon
Gilded by Phœbus, with his straw flute gone

Stands in the cocks of snow, once cocks of hay
Gilded and rustling o'er that green land lay ;

And shadows brush the statue, not the snowy
Winged bees Sylvia and Thisbe, Chloe,

That sang sweet country songs in owl-dusked leaves :
' Poor Rose is dying ' and ' Sweet Sultan grieves.'

But time drifts owl-dusk o'er the brightest eyes
And dulls the sleepy gods and the sad wise,

And shall despoil our woods and monuments
And make them like the small bees' cerements . . .

And heavy is dark Time, that ever moans
Among thick leaves his mournful overtones.

Now the snow lies upon my rose-shaped heart
And on the years, and many a glittering chart

The dog-furred strawberry leaves bear, maps from
dream
To dream, and berries with Orion's gleam.

This dark green country temple of the snows
Hides still the amber dust of nymph and rose,

The melons' dogskin flowers where the mellow
Whining early dew is butter-yellow

And the nymphs' smooth-eared hound far from the
light
When early dew whines hound-like as in fright.

I looked out from my window where the urban
Leaves seemed turkeys, (Sultans in a turban),
Across the lake where, cupolas and gables,
The ripples seemed deserted Georgian stables ;

And my old shadow nods a turbaned head,
The full moon sees one candle's thick gold thread

Pierce through the thick leaves near the window sill
Where she her lovely fire and light doth spill.

The rose that shone like the first light of tears
Is faded, and its leaves, bright as the years

When we knew life and love and youth, are wet
With tears beneath the shady winter. Yet

Although the small immortal serpent cries
'I, only, know if Plato still be wise,'

Great golden Hector had the pomp and pride
Of waves, but like the strength of these, he died;

And the first soundless wrinkles fall like snow
On many a golden cheek, and none may know,

Seeing your ancient wrinkled shadow-shape,
If this be long-dead Venus or an ape,

To patience with the apeish dust I came
Seeing this mimicry of death a game;
Since all things have beginnings; the bright plume
Was once thin grass in shady winter's gloom

And the furred fire is barking for the shape
Of hoarse-voiced animals; cold air agape

Whines to be shut in water's shape and plumes;
All this is hidden in the winter's glooms.

I too from ruined walls hung upside down
And, bat-like, only saw Death's ruined town

And mumbling crumbling dust . . . I saw the people
Mouthing blindly for the earth's blind nipple.

Their thick sleep dreams not of the infinite
Wild strength the grass must have to find the light

With all the bulk of earth across its eyes
And strength, and the huge weight of centuries.

Hate-hidden by a monk's cowl of ape's pelf,
Bear-clumsy and appalling, mine own self
Devouring, blinded by the earth's thick hood
I crouched, Atridæ-like devoured my blood

And knew the anguish of the skeleton
Deserted by the flesh, with Death alone.

Then my immortal Sun rose, Heavenly Love,
To rouse my carrion to life and move

The polar night, the boulder that rolled this
My heart, my Sisyphus, in the abyss.

Come then, my Sun, to melt the eternal ice
Of Death, and crumble the thick centuries,
Nor shrink, my soul, as dull wax owlish eyes
In the sun's light, before my sad eternities.

GOLD COAST CUSTOMS

NOTES

"The Negroes indulge that perfect contempt for humanity which in its bearing on Justice and Morality is the fundamental characteristic of the race. They have, moreover, no knowledge of the immortality of the soul, although spectres are supposed to appear. The undervaluing of humanity among them reaches an incredible degree of intensity. Tyranny is regarded as no wrong, and cannibalism is looked upon as quite customary and proper. Among us instinct deters from it, if we can speak of instinct at all as appertaining to man. But with the Negro this is not the case, and the devouring of human flesh is altogether consonant with the general principles of the African race; to the sensual Negro, human flesh is but an object of sense—mere flesh. At the death of a king hundreds are killed and eaten; prisoners are butchered and their flesh sold in the market-place; the victor is accustomed to eat the flesh of his fallen foe."—HEGEL'S *Philosophy of History*.

Page 7, *line* 5: "Munza rattles his bones in the dust." King Munza reigned, in 1874, over the Monbuttoo, a race of cannibals in Central Africa. These notes, and the drawing on the cover, are taken from Dr. Georg Schweinfurth's

The Heart of Africa (translated by Ellen Frewer, published by Messrs. Sampson Low). Of the Monbuttoo and their neighbours the Niam-Niam, we read: "Human fat is universally sold. . . . Should any lone and solitary individual die, uncared for . . . he would be sure to be devoured in the very district in which he lived. During our residence at the court of Munza the general rumour was quite current that nearly every day some little child was sacrificed to supply his meal. There are cases in which bearers who died from fatigue had been dug out of the graves in which they had been buried . . . in order that they might be devoured. The cannibalism of the Monbuttoo is the most pronounced of all the known nations of Africa. Surrounded as they are by a number of people who, being inferior to them in culture, are consequently held in great contempt, they have just the opportunity which they want for carrying on expeditions of war and plunder, which result in the acquisition of a booty which is especially coveted by them, consisting of human flesh. But with it all, the Monbuttoos are a noble race of men, men who display a certain national pride . . . men to whom one may put a reasonable question and receive a reasonable answer. The Nubians can never say enough in praise of their faithfulness in friendly intercourse and of the order and stability of their national life. According to the Nubians, too, the Monbuttoos were their superiors in the arts of war."

Any traveller from Monbuttoo visiting first of all our new "Original Parties" and then walking down the Embankment, or in those streets of Revue Theatres, where our late heroes sell matches in the gutter, could not fail to be impressed by the superiority of our civilization over that of the Monbuttoos.

Page 14, *line* 3 : " And her soul, the Cannibal Amazon's mart."

" Tradition alleges that in former times a state composed of women made itself famous by its conquests : it was a state at whose head was a woman. She is said to have pounded her own son in a mortar, and to have had the blood of pounded children constantly at hand. She is said to have driven away or put to death all the males, and commanded the death of all male children. These furies destroyed everything in the neighbourhood, and were driven to constant plunderings because they did not cultivate the land. . . . This infamous state, the report goes on to say, subsequently disappeared."—HEGEL's *Philosophy of History*, chapter on Africa.

Six Songs. These were meant, originally, to be part of a long poem about Bluebeard. But the long poem is unwritten, and only the songs remain.

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